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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed for Alberta (Canada) parents of French immersion students beginning formal English language instruction for the first time. In question-and-answer format, it discusses issues commonly of concern to these parents. Issues addressed include the following: why English instruction is introduced in the second or third year of schooling; what the child already knows about reading and writing; how long it will take for the child to catch up with children in the regular English-language program; what the parent can expect to be happening in the English language learning classroom; what to do if the child is experiencing difficulties; and helping the child make a successful transition. Samples of 3 grade 3 children's writing, at the beginning of the transition year and 10 weeks later, are also presented, with comments on specific areas of progress in English composition. (MSE)

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Language Learning For French Immersion Students In The Transition Year

Information For **Parents**

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L anguage Learning

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F rench Immersion Students

I n The Transition Year

I nformation For **Parents**

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Alberta Education acknowledges with appreciation the contributions of the following individuals:

Writer: Margaret Sanders, Grande Prairie Public S.D. No. 2357

Members of the English Learning Transitional Year Advisory Committee:

Norman Blais, Calgary Regional Office, Alberta Education
Suzanne Gareau-Kubicki, Language Services Branch, Alberta Education
Myrna McGrath, Peace River Public S.D. No. 10
Yolande Moquin, Edmonton Separate S.D. No. 7

Editors: John Proctor, County of Strathcona Public S.D. No. 20
Elana Scrabba, Student Evaluation Branch, Alberta Education
Susan Lynch, Curriculum Branch, Alberta Education
Marcel Lavallée, Language Services Branch, Alberta Education
Anita Jenkins, English Editor, Edmonton

Desktop Publishing: Stella Rykes

Word Processing: Cécile Comeau
Anita Bartosch

Illustrator: Gorge Larkadas

Project Management: Ghislaine Lavergne, Language Services Branch

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Language Learning

Introduction

The transition year is an exciting time for you and your child. For the first time your child will be receiving formal instruction in English in school. New doors will be opened with the discovery that he or she can use the English language in new and challenging ways. You will have many questions about what you can expect, and how you can he p your child most easily make this transition from French to English. This booklet has been prepared to help answer these questions and to introduce ideas which you may wish to further discuss with your child's teachers.

Why is English instruction usually introduced in your child's second or third year of schooling?

For most children in French immersion, English was the first language learned and used in their homes and communities. Because French is a new language for the students, the school program focuses on French first. So that students are not confused by having to learn in two languages at the same time, the first few years are devoted to allowing them to learn in French only.

After three years in school, most students are working well in French and have learned much about how they can use language to learn - through speaking, listening, reading and writing. They are now ready to use the English language at school to continue to learn - through speaking, listening, reading and writing, but in another language.

What does my child already know about reading and writing?

The language learning experiences that your child has had in the French immersion program prepare him or her for reading and writing in English. In addition, the important experiences that you have provided in the home (such as having books in your home for children to look at, **reading to your child**, and talking with your child as he or she attempts to understand the surrounding world) equally prepare for the successful transition from French to English. These background language learning experiences that children bring to school contribute directly to their success in both French and English language learning.

The language learning experiences prepare students for reading and writing in English.

Many of the understandings that your child has acquired about language learning through instruction in French are processes that can be **transferred** to the learning of any language. Among the major attitudes, understandings and skills that children transfer are:

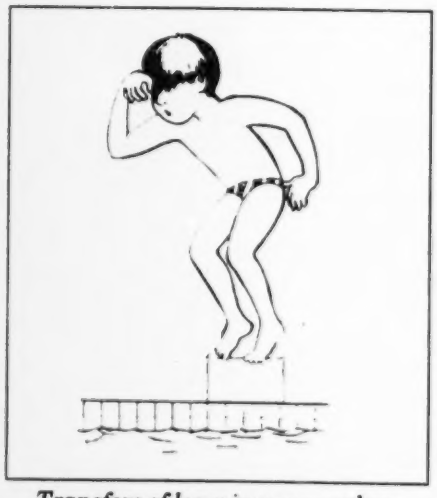
- growing confidence in their ability to use language to learn through talking, listening, reading and writing

- confidence in their ability to take on new learning challenges and to persevere when success is not immediately apparent
- a knowledge of many letter sounds which are similar in both languages
- an understanding of how letter sounds are put together to form words
- an understanding of how words are put together to form sentences
- an understanding that written language communicates some form of meaning.

How long will it take for my child to catch up to children in the regular English program?

Your child will need your support and understanding during the transition year. At first, your child will do many of the things that **beginning** readers and writers do. It takes time for transfer of learning to occur; transfer occurs most successfully and naturally in situations where the child is encouraged to take risks and feels free to make mistakes.

In addition to the elements of language that transfer, there are some that "interfere". For example, there are elements of the French language sound system which cannot be transferred to English because they are different. It takes a while for children to sort these out. The amazing thing is that children are very efficient at transferring those things that can transfer and adapting to the understanding that some things don't transfer!



Transfers of learning occur when your child is encouraged to take risks.

In addition to the elements of language that transfer, there are some that "interfere". For example, there are elements of the French language sound system which cannot be transferred to English because they are different. It takes a while for children to sort these out. The amazing thing is that children are very efficient at transferring those things that can transfer and adapting to the understanding that some things don't transfer!

Children progress very quickly when they begin to be instructed in English. At the end of two years most students are working at the same level as the students in the regular program. On the provincial Grade 6 Language Arts Achievement Test, most French immersion students perform as well as or better than students in the regular program.

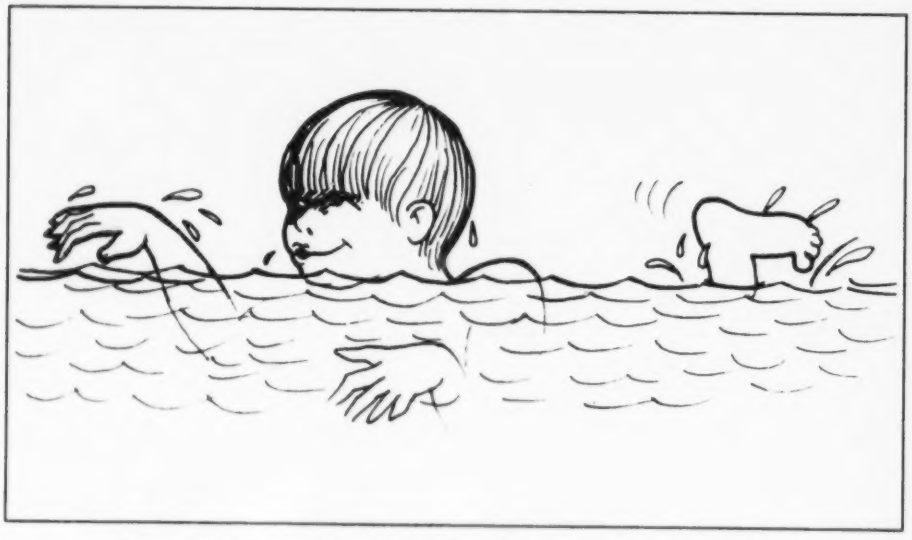
What can I expect to see happening in my child's English language learning classroom?

To begin with, the teacher will focus on your child's main areas of strength in English: speaking and listening abilities. The teacher will provide excellent models of English language use by reading aloud from children's literature - you can expect to see children being read to often. The teacher will also model how listeners or readers react to what they hear or read. So, you will see discussion occurring throughout the process of enjoying and learning from literature.

Before the children actually read a selection on their own, the teacher will devote attention to what are commonly called pre-reading activities. This will include discussion to build understanding and anticipation of the ideas the child will read about. This "getting ready to read" may involve developing a chart or a "web" of ideas, or perhaps brainstorming. Before reading A.A. Milne's story about Eeyore's birthday, for example, there would be some discussion about the whole idea of birthdays and the expectation of gift giving. Through time spent in this way, the student is skillfully focused on what will be the main action or ideas in the story.

The teacher may then read the selection to the students, or the students may read the selection by themselves or with a partner, or in a small group, taking parts to create what is known as "readers' theater". The emphasis will be on providing the necessary support to ensure students are successful and that their self-confidence in themselves as readers continues to grow.

Before the children engage in writing activities, the teacher will take time to provide the necessary pre-writing experience. This can take the form of discussion, chart-building, word bank development, and small group discussion or planning. Much time is spent helping students build the necessary strategies and understandings that will ensure that they become confident and successful writers. Writing time in a classroom will be a busy time for all. You can expect to see students helping one another and the teacher working with individual students. Language is always a social experience and the business of learning



Learning means doing something that could'nt be done before.

how to write (using a new language for writing) inevitably involves cooperation and collaboration as teacher and students work together.

What should I do if my child is experiencing difficulties?

Essentially, learning means trying to do something that couldn't be done before; so it is natural for any learner to encounter some difficulties. If you see that your child is encountering difficulties that are causing frustration, it is important to talk with your child's teacher. In most instances difficulties will disappear as the student adapts to working in English at school. If problems persist, you may wish to consult with the school about the possibility of accessing some special learning support.

You may become anxious about your child's learning when you first see your child reading and writing in English. Remember that your child has spent valuable time in school over the first few years and has achieved a great deal. Keep in mind that children in the transition year are faced with adapting to a new set of learning requirements. There is an expectation that they will become as proficient in reading and writing English as they have done in French. You can be reassured that the vast majority of children meet this expectation with relative ease.

If you wish further reassurance that the very best is being done to help your child to make the transition across languages, become informed through discussion with teachers and principals and through association with such

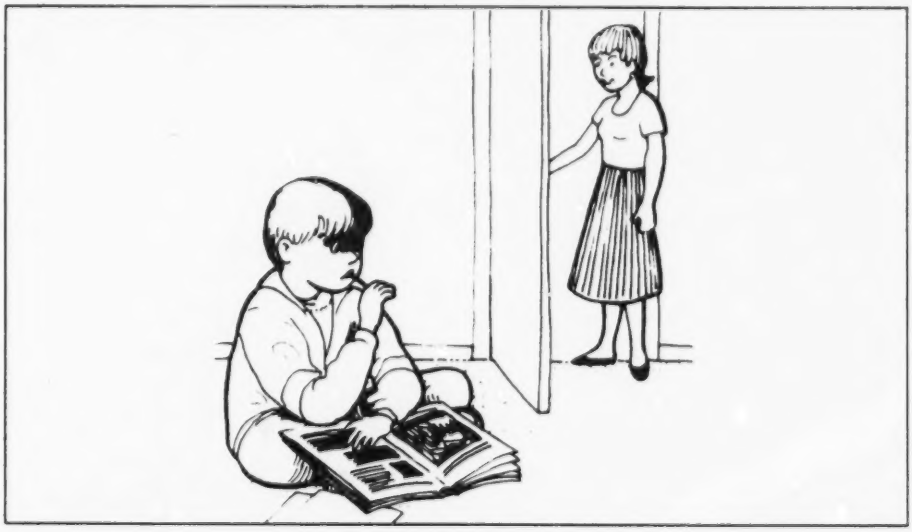
organizations as Canadian Parents For French. All of these people can offer knowledge based on experience and will have the best interests of your child in mind.

What can I do to help my child make a successful transition from French to English?

The foundation for a successful transition has been laid long before your child reaches his or her second or third year of schooling. It began when you shared books and experiences with your child.

You probably have continued similar activities right through the school years. While your child has been increasing his or her French vocabulary and understandings in school, you have provided for the same growth in English at home.

It is crucial that you continue this support by reading to and with your child at home, and by letting your child see you read as an everyday occurrence, by talking with your child about what you see and experience together, and by listening and responding to what your child says.



Parental support and encouragement are major contributors to a child's success: Education is a partnership between the home and the school!

Encourage your child to write at home. She or he could write a letter to someone, take or send a message, make a list or write a story. Respond honestly to what your child writes and avoid criticizing spelling or punctuation during the transitional learning period.

Encourage your child to write at home. She or he could write a letter to someone, take or send a message, make a list or write a story. Respond honestly to what your child writes and avoid criticizing spelling or punctuation during the transitional learning period.

With your support, your child will make a successful and easy transition into using the English language for reading and writing. Later, once your child has developed a confident fluency in expressing ideas, you will be able to act as an editor and help your child develop control over the conventions of written English.

Remember that this transition year can be a time of anxiety for many students. They need time and reassurance to realize that they in fact do know a lot about the English language, and that they have learned a great deal in their French language arts classes that will help them with English language learning.

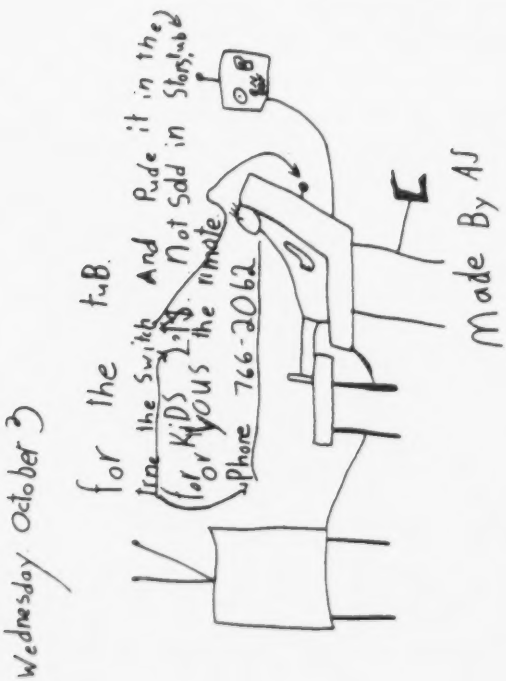
During this period you can help them by appreciating their beginning attempts at reading and writing, and by recognizing that mistakes are a necessary part of learning language. Keep in mind that there will be a wide range of capabilities within each classroom at this stage. Some children will be reading and writing capably, others will be at the very beginning stages, and others are in between. All of these stages are normal and acceptable as part of the development of language learning, and immediate growth will be evident

Samples of Students' Written Work

Samples of Students' Written Work

The following writing samples were written by three grade 3 students in a French immersion classroom during their first year of instruction in English.

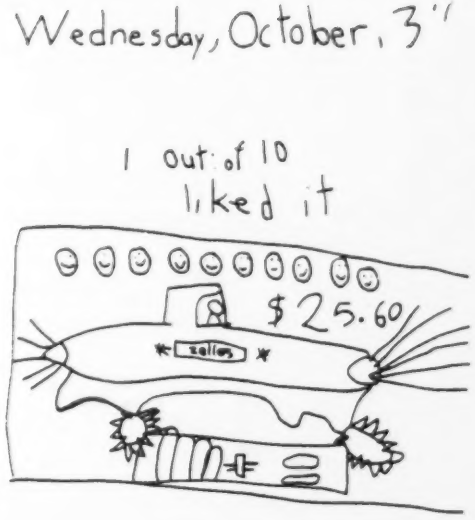
The first set of samples were written on October 3, 1990. The children had been enjoying a poem about bath toys and following a discussion of individual favorite bath toys, they had discussed the possibility of inventing new items for bath entertainment. They were interested in designing advertisements to promote the items. This open-ended writing experience is ideal in that it allows the children to communicate visually and to write as much or as little as they feel comfortable in doing. This teacher recognizes that the learners are at different stages in developing writing competency in English and so wants to encourage activities that allow individuals to participate in communicating their ideas. The teacher is able to examine the work of various students and make observations about some of the language understandings that students have.


Wednesday October 3
for the tuB
trne the Switch And Pude it in the
(for KiDS 2,95$ Not Sdd in Stors)
or yous the rimote
Phone 766-2062
Made By AJ

A.J. designed a fairly elaborate toy that was accompanied by fairly elaborate instructions. He tells us that the toy is "for the tuB". The user is instructed to "trne the switch and Pude it in the tub or yous the rimote." He also tells that the toy is "for KiDs" and "not Sold in Stors". "Phone 766-2062" and an arrow directs the buyer to the price "2,95$".

We can see that this student has correctly transferred what he knows about consonant sounds from French to English and that he has learned much about vowel sounds in English. He has incorrectly transferred the vowel sound represented by the letter/i/from French to English, (rimote) and has yet to learn the digraph /ur/ (trne). These can quickly be taught to him in discussion of this project. He will also need to be shown the reversed placement of "$" in English script. He has shown quite clearly that he is able to communicate his thoughts in writing.

Scott has greatly relied on visual information in creating his project. We see that he is able to communicate what his toy looks like, where we can get it ("Zellers"), how much it costs ("$25.60), and the fact that "1 out of 10 liked it". He self-corrects himself in removing the"s" from "out". He also knows the placement of "$" in English script. The teacher would want to encourage him to develop increased confidence to express himself in writing.



Alison appears to be a confident English user. She has good control of English vocabulary: "this amazing thing, is a bath toy. Ther is a switch control beside the arm rest" (labelled "Switch control"). She also labels the "foot rest" and the "Chair". She informs us that the toy is "not in stors" and to "Call 532-0198" for the chair which is "Made in Canada by Alison O'Toole". She provides a great deal of written information to accompany the visual. The teacher will want to help her acquire some language conventions such as capital letters at sentence beginnings and how to use the comma. It's nice to see her experimenting and this should be encouraged.

Ten weeks later, in December, these same students were working on a project (connected with the teacher reading The Best Christmas Pageant Ever) that required them to plan and write a Christmas pageant. We see a great deal of development in both the volume and expertise of these grade 3 students' writing.

A Christmas Pageant
planned by AJ

characters

1. baby
2. Star
3. 3 Kings
4. Mary
5. Joseph

Once upon a time three Kings were haveing fun. When Suddenly a big Star went over them IT was flyng quickly. The Kings ran after it. The Smolest Smacht into tow pepol. Oops I'm Sorry. "That's OK" Said Mary. The Star Stopped rite over top of Mary and joseph. The three Kings jumped up and

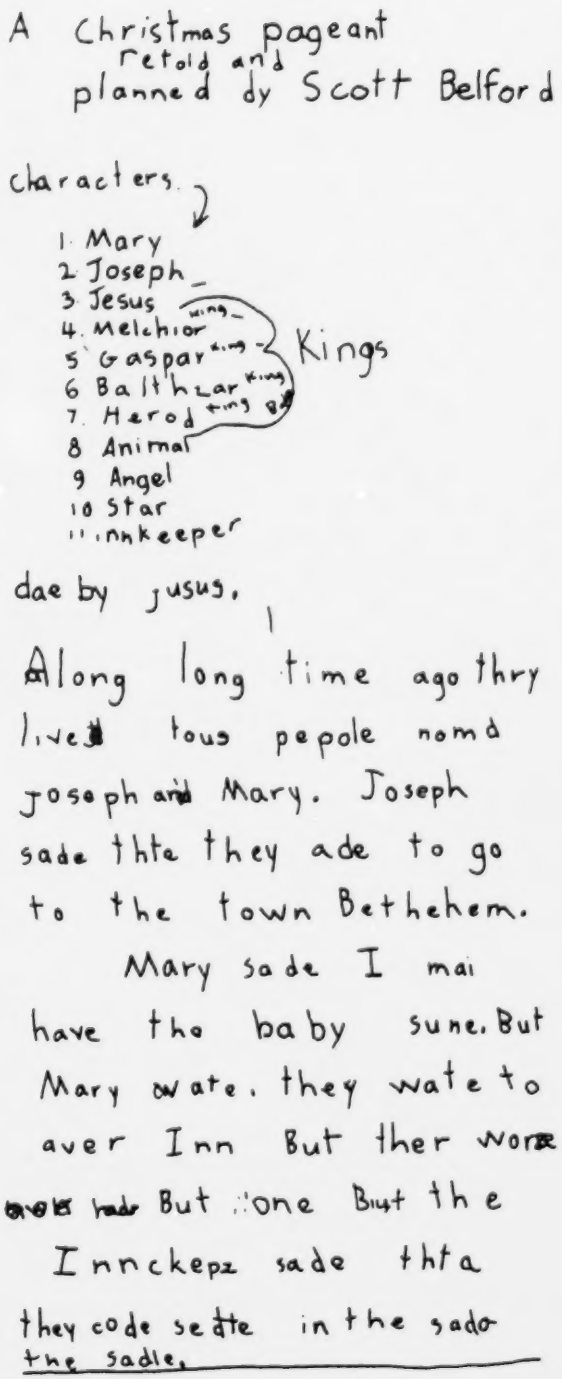
Said Mary. The Star Stopped rite over top of Mary and joseph. The three Kings jumped up and

A.J. has written a narrative. He has established the main characters, setting, problem and resolution. He has spelled many words capably and produces sensible, recognizable spellings of words that he doesn't yet know ("no" for "know", "new" for "knew", "y" for "why", "rite" for "right", "allrite" for"alright"). He is learning to use contractions ("let's", "that's","were" for "we're"). He is experimenting with the use of dialogue and sometimes punctuates it correctly. He is aware, too, of other forms of punctuation and frequently uses them correctly. He also attempts to link ideas by connectives of time ("Once upon a time three Kings were haveing fun. When Suddenly a big Star went over them."). His written work shows the inappropriate use of capital letters that the first sample showed. This can be discussed with him. It is likely evident in his French written work.

down. Hurrah your having a King for a baby. Radical awesome a King for a baby joseph said.

That's allrite weth me said m. We are going to be rich rich rich rich. Not all Kings are rich. The Kings asked were are you going? were going to pay our taxes. the Kings new joseph. now they no he payed the taxes to them that's y they are rich. I'm having a baby tonigh

I just no it let's go to a aport-mit. we can find a Stable y a Stable. that's were I was born. that same night the baby was born.



A Christmas pageant
retold and
planned by Scott Belford

characters.

1. Mary
2. Joseph
3. Jesus
4. Melchior king
5. Gaspar king
6. Balthazar king
7. Herod king
8. Animal
9. Angel
10. Star
11. innkeeper

Kings

dae by jusus.

Along long time ago thry
lived tous pepole nomd
joseph and Mary. Joseph
sade thte they ade to go
to the town Bethehem.
Mary sade I mai
have the baby sune. But
Mary wate. they wate to
aver Inn But ther wore
But one But the
Innckepz sade thta
they code sete in the sado
the sadle.

Scott is developing confidence in expressing himself in writing. His pageant plan is organized into two parts: "daeby Jusus" (baby Jesus) and "the star". Both sections are well developed and he uses approximate spellings to keep things flowing. We see that he reflects on his writing through correcting and changing as he goes along. He removed two characters from his plan after he began writing and his work shows erasures, insertions and changing letters. He experiments with sentence structures: "Along long time ago thry lived tous pepole nomd Joseph and Mary". (A long, long time ago there lived two people named Joseph and Mary.)

We can see that Scott is still sorting out a lot of things in the transfer of writing in French to writing in English. He is sorting out how to deal with dates "Decembre the 10, Monday 1990". He self-corrected in removing Monday from just after "Decembre". He doesn't have the correct order yet but knows that there is a difference. He has correctly capitalized December and Monday but has carried "the 10" from his French writing. He has called on background French knowledge to write "tous" for two and "mai" for may. He has used initial consonants accurately except for the d/b reversal) but is still sorting out vowel sounds and letter order in words. ("wate" for went, "thin" for then, "thte" for that, etc.) He has not yet learned how to

2 The star

they wer 3 kings and ther name wer Melchior Gaspar and Dalthzar. OUT thir woz a dode kings and is nam waze Herod. But the thei gode kings wine thiy wer wacki they sad a star. Big tine ine star youve aver sene. Thy vkd.itht e star ler ta baedy jesus. anb they gave hime cise. and He gue up ta de Big and shang

The End

capitalize a title. Scott definitely has ideas to express and the skill and ability to organize those ideas. He is aware of the different conventions required in writing in two languages and is working at acquiring those conventions.

It is likely that Alison has been able to write in English for some time. She has easily transferred the ability to create and express ideas from French to English. It is also likely that she has been reading in English because she knows how English words look (pointy, donkey). Her work contains very few approximate spellings. This shows good mastery of English written vocabulary. She is willing to use approximate spellings to keep her ideas flowing when working on a first draft. (It is likely that she would be able to identify the incorrectly spelled words in this piece if asked.) Her approximate spellings are reasonable and show that she has much information about spelling possibilities ("inn ceaper" shows that she knows about the "ea" digraph.) She has correctly transferred what she has learned about punctuation.

In this story the characters are:

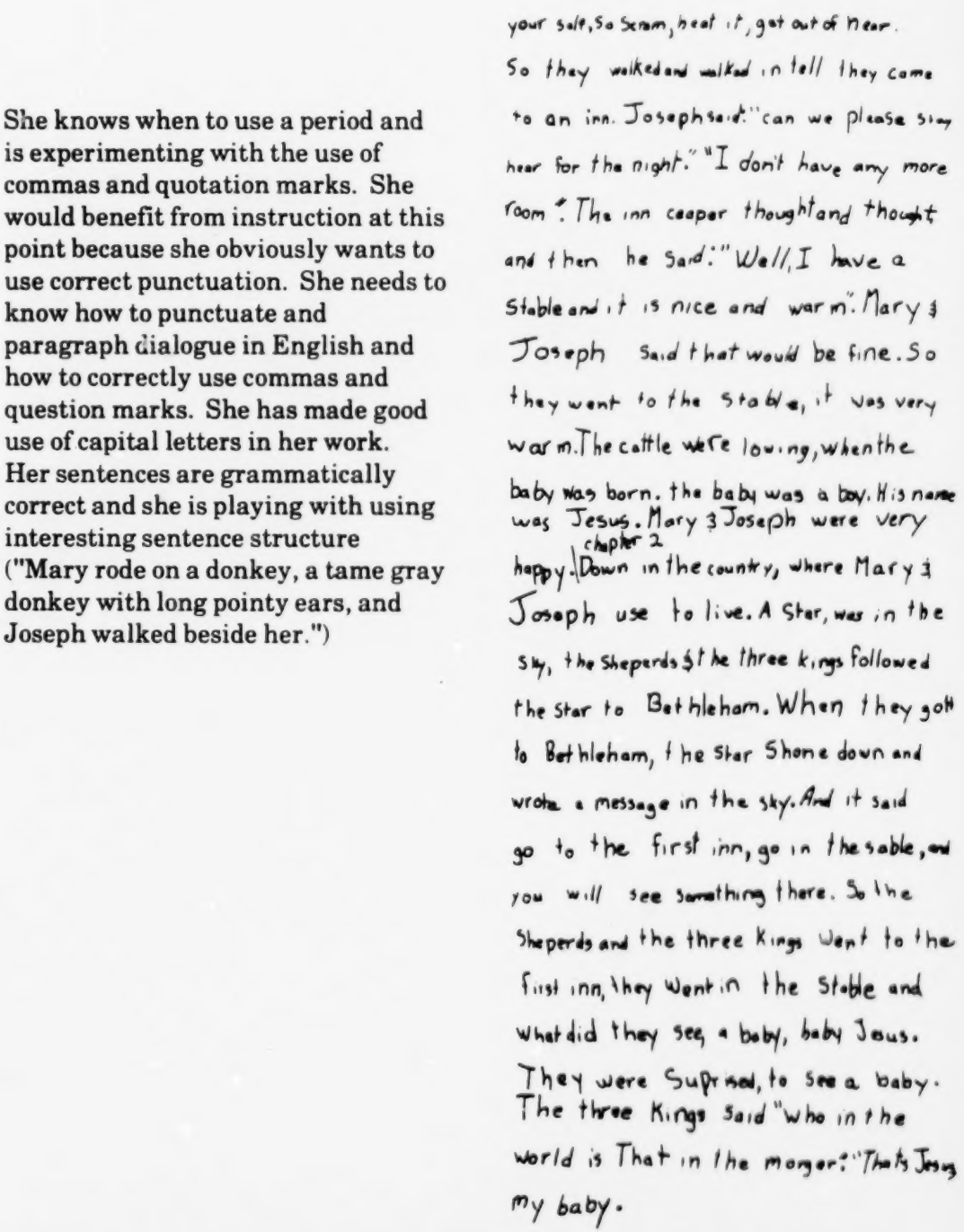
1 Mary
2 Joseph
3 The three Kings
4 Jesus
5 The Star
6 Shepherds
7 inn ceaper

chapter 1

Once upon a time, there were two very kind people. There names were Mary & Joseph. One day Joseph said "Mary, we must go to Bethlehem. But what if I have my baby there." Said Mary. "Don't worry Mary". So Mary decided to go. Mary rodeon a donkey, a tame gray donkey with long pointy ears, and Joseph walked beside her.

The first house said: "I have to many Children, and you are old inafe to take care of

She knows when to use a period and is experimenting with the use of commas and quotation marks. She would benefit from instruction at this point because she obviously wants to use correct punctuation. She needs to know how to punctuate and paragraph dialogue in English and how to correctly use commas and question marks. She has made good use of capital letters in her work. Her sentences are grammatically correct and she is playing with using interesting sentence structure ("Mary rode on a donkey, a tame gray donkey with long pointy ears, and Joseph walked beside her.")



your safe, So Scram, beat it, get out of hear.
So they walked and walked in tell they came to an inn. Joseph said: "can we please stay hear for the night." "I don't have any more room". The inn cooper thought and thought and then he said: "Well, I have a stable and it is nice and warm". Mary & Joseph said that would be fine. So they went to the stable, it was very warm. The cattle were lowing, when the baby was born. the baby was a boy. His name was Jesus. Mary & Joseph were very happy. chapter 2
Down in the country, where Mary & Joseph use to live. A Star, was in the sky, the Sheperds & the three kings followed the star to Bethleham. When they got to Bethleham, the star Shone down and wrote a message in the sky. And it said go to the first inn, go in the sable, and you will see something there. So the Sheperds and the three Kings went to the first inn, they went in the Stable and what did they see, a baby, baby Jesus. They were Suprised, to see a baby. The three Kings said "who in the world is That in the manger?" "That's Jesus my baby.

Like all students making the transition from writing in French to writing in English, these writers show continual progress and growth. They are willing to take risks and try things when they work. As they receive ongoing and consistent encouragement to take these risks these children will continue to use and extend the knowledge and the skills that they have.